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TAGS: PREL KCRM PGOV PINR KDEM UNMIK YI
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ICTY DEFENSE TEAM VISIT TO MASSACRE SITE
CREATES UPROAR

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The unannounced visit of two Serbian ICTY defense lawyers to a rural village that was the site of a 1999 Serb-on-Albanian massacre caused an uproar among village residents, virtually all of whom are relatives of the victims. Kosovo Albanians blocked the main village road and stoned the visitors' vehicles, prompting police to deploy tear gas. Many of the Kosovo Albanian village residents and area radicals insist that the visitors were not lawyers or UNMIK officials but former Kosovo Serb residents of the village who were involved in the massacre. The Kosovo press has generally fanned misinformation coming from the scene.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) According to UNMIK sources, on May 25 two Serbian lawyers accredited to the International War Crimes Tribunal (ICTY) as defense council in the case against seven high-level indictees -- including former Serbian President Milan Milutinovic and former Chief of Staff of the Yugoslav Army Dragoljub Ojdanic -- visited the village of Krushe e Vogel/Mala Krusa in Prizren municipality. The adjoining villages of Krushe e Vogel and Krush e Madhe were the venues of a March 26, 1999 massacre after which 363 ethnic Albanian men and adolescent boys went missing (Ref A). The remains of 107 of them have been located, mostly in mass graves inside Serbia, and have since been returned to their families. The rest remain missing.

¶3. (SBU) Deputy UNMIK Police Commissioner Paul Hutchings reported in an e-mail made available to E/P chief that the convoy, consisting of several UNMIK vehicles, UNMIK Close Protection and one KPS Regional Operations Support Unit (ROSU), entered the village at about 1130 on May 25 and the lawyers began asking residents about the March 1999 events

through a Serbian-Albanian interpreter provided by UNMIK. Some of the villagers, evidently mistaking the interpreter for a Kosovo Serb former village resident they believe was complicit in the massacre, blocked the convoy's progress and pelting the vehicles with stones. Hutchings reported that the ROSU was then deployed and, when a car window broke and the interpreter injured, the ROSU fired tear gas into the crowd, managing to disperse it, whereupon the convey was able to leave the village. An UNMIK press release later confirmed that three police officers and the interpreter were injured in the incident, along with several Kosovo Albanian villagers, most of whom suffered effects from the tear gas. The media reported that 37 people were injured -- 21 adults and 16 children.

¶4. (SBU) Krushe e Vogel resident and frequent USOP contact Agron Limani called PolFSN as events were unfolding. He said the incident began when residents, who had not been informed in advance of the visit, thought they recognized former Serb residents riding through town in the UNMIK convoy and attempted to question them regarding the whereabouts of their loved ones. (NOTE. Some grieving family members remain convinced that their missing relatives are detained in secret prisons in Serbia (ref B). END NOTE.) Limani otherwise essentially confirmed Hutching's account of events, adding that village residents blocked the main road connecting connects Prizren and Gjakova municipalities for an hour after the convey left, opening the road only after UNMIK Police Commission Kai Vittrup promised to meet with them. He also said that villagers continue to believe that two of the visitors were former village residents Borislav Cvetkovic and Gordana Djordjevic. He alleged that Cvetkovic was involved in separating men and boys from their families in March 1999 and that Djordjevic's brothers were involved in the massacres.

¶5. (SBU) Amcit Wayne Hissong, deputy chief of the organized

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crime directorate at UNMIK, told RLA that the visit to Krush e Vogel was in preparation for an International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) trial scheduled to start in July. He said two Serbian defense attorneys visited ten sites in Kosovo and did not experience any problems at any of them other than Krush e Vogel. He said the KPS has established a task force to investigate but added that he believes the police conducted themselves appropriately. He said Gordana Blanusa, the injured interpreter, sustained a superficial head wound. (NOTE. Blanusa briefly worked at USOP last year. Her personnel file lists her as being from Gracanica. END NOTE.)

¶6. (SBU) SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen quickly condemned the incident, saying, "It is important for the people of Kosovo to understand that their quest for justice can only be achieved through the course of justice, not by extra-judicial means." He said rule of law must be respected and, "at this crucial time, their every action has a bearing on the future of Kosovo." The government of Kosovo issued a statement echoing these concerns, but added that it does not support the use of violence against citizens and announced that further investigations would be conducted.

¶7. (SBU) Kosovo media widely reported the incident. Some television stations reported that the villagers believed that UNMIK had been trying to return Kosovo Serbs to the village; other stations skipped the sourcing and incorrectly reported as a fact that the incident was a returns visit gone bad. Even after the UNMIK press release, rumors continue to fly that Kosovo Serb former residents of the village, either those directly involved in crimes or their family members, were traveling in the convoy.

¶8. (SBU) The Prizren branch of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) veterans organization accused UNMIK of "conspiring with Belgrade to create chaos and panic in Kosovo with the

intention of destabilizing the situation." Self-styled radical Albin Kurti's Self Determination Movement accused UNMIK of "the gravest provocation of the people of Kosovo -- returning Serbs to the most sensitive place possible," and the radical National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (LKCK) said police attacked defenseless widows and orphans, in order to "please criminals" who had returned to the "crime scene."

¶9. (SBU) On May 26 Limani told PolFSN that Commissioner Vittrup and Deputy Kosovo Protection Corps Commissioner Sheremet Ahmeti came to Krush e Vogel on the evening of May 25 and met with the villagers. Limani said the meeting was constructive, and the residents were pleased that they came so quickly. He said the parties had agreed in particular that the village council and Prizren authorities would be notified in advance of any future visits.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT. USOP officers have several times visited Krush e Vogel and other villages in its vicinity. Ambassador Frank Wisner, the Secretary's special representative for the Kosovo status talks, met there in April with several relatives of missing persons (ref C). Many of these survivors have clearly never come to grips with the overwhelming tragedy of March 26, 1999. Visits there even by Kosovo prosecutors demand careful planning given that many of the villagers cling to the irrational belief that their missing relatives remain alive. Visits by Serbians, UNMIK notions of political correctness notwithstanding, demand at a minimum advance notice to residents and careful explanation of who is coming and why. UNHCR would never conduct returnee "go and see" visits to former Kosovo Serb homes without such planning. It astounds us that UNMIK saw no potential difficulty with the idea of unannounced visits to massacre sites by lawyers defending individuals charged with the mass murder of Kosovo Albanians. END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release

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to Special Envoy Ahtisaari.
GURIAN